

Forum

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IS THERE ROOM FOR DIFFERENCES OF OPINION IN A SOCIALIST PARTY?

by Rab. (W.S.P.)

First of all, let me emphasise that "opinions" and "principles" are not synonymous terms. By "principles", I refer to the acceptance of the Declaration of Principles of the companion parties as a satisfactory generalisation of the socialist case. There are certain socialist principles upon which we do not compromise, especially in light of the evidence of unfolding events.

Our organisations are democratic, i.e. controlled by the membership. Therefore, it is essential that the membership be socialist. In Forum, June 1953, I defined a socialist as:

"Broadly speaking, a socialist is one who understands that capitalism can no longer be reformed or administered in the interest of the working class or of society; that capitalism is incapable of eliminating its inherent problems of poverty, wars, crises, etc.; and that socialism offers the solutions for the social problems besetting mankind, since the material developments, with the single exception of an aroused socialist majority, are now ripe for the inauguration of socialism."

The emphasis of socialists is on our common agreements. There are relatively few issues on which we take an uncompromising position. All the companion parties stand together - as one - on such questions as: the conscious, majority, political nature of the socialist revolution; the materialist nature of existence; the Materialist Conception of History and the generalisations of Marxian political economy; the resulting implications of the above on such issues as leadership, reformism and religion; and on socialism, as a system of society.

The difficulty comes in frequently raising an opinion to the stature of a principle. In contrast to principles, relatively few in number, there are innumerable matters upon which socialists may have all kinds of opinions. Opinions may be formed regarding: speculations on details of the future; events and factors in the current scene; attitudes on any number of things; even conflicting anticipations projecting detailed workings of a socialist society.

One of the most abused words in the socialist's vocabulary is "position". We do have positions on principles but, unfortunately, the word "position" loses its significance when applied in an absolute and arbitrary sense to any and all situations and problems. For purposes of illustration, here are a few "opinions" that are not "principles" or "positions". -

"Socialism will come in our lifetime."

"Socialism is a long time in the future".

"Hydrogen bombs make actual military wars unfeasible for capitalism."

"Trade Unions, today, work against the interests of the working class."

Also, how can we take a "position" on the disagreements among physicists, biologists, medicine, etc.? (We do have a position on materialism. We clash with scientists who are opposed to materialism.)

It is to be doubted that every single comrade sees eye-to-eye on all phases of socialist problems with his fellow members. Forum, the internal party journal of the S.P.G.B. itself, is an excellent demonstration that there is plenty of room for differences of opinions within a socialist party.

The autonomy of several companion parties reflect the recognition of this understanding (aside from the fact of national problems of each party). For example:- Would it be anti-socialist or unprincipled to allow authorities, having something to contribute in their specialised field, such as mathematics, Africa, art criticism, or whatnot, to speak at a party meeting, provided that we tied it up with socialism? Not all the parties agree on this procedure. Was it a violation of socialist principles when The Western Socialist published valuable socialist articles by non-members of the party? (Incidentally, experience has convinced me that we should have made it quite clear the writers were not members and were not speaking for the party.) These items are matters of opinion and not of principles.

It is very pertinent to observe that, over the years, the many conferences and referenda of the companion parties have made many changes in policies and procedures, (some well-advised and some ill-advised). They all were, in the main, matters of opinion, were they not?

An unfailing guide to distinguish between opinions and principles is to bear in mind: socialist principles deal with processes and generalisations whereas, usually, opinions deal with specifics and details. We may be sadly mistaken on particulars but we are on invincible grounds on the generalisations of socialism, which are based on scientific analyses and are not blueprints.

Members should not fear to express opinions or to speak out lest there be dire consequences. We must avoid an atmosphere that discourages reexamining and questioning. We should bend over backwards to gain and retain members, leaving wide room for individual differences. We should be narrow enough to exclude all who are not socialists yet broad enough to embrace everyone who is.

It is understood that a representative of the party speaking under party auspices states the party case and that he makes it clear whenever he expresses his own personal opinion.

Rab, W.S.P.

(This is not a new question, by any means, but it is an important matter to thrash out. Your comments are eagerly awaited. Those interested may reply through the columns of Forum or by writing me personally at 62, Woodcliff Road, Newton Highlands 61, Mass., U.S.A.)

F O R U M

The Editorial Committee regret the delay in the publication of this issue. This has been the result of a number of factors, the principal one being the shortage of suitable material.

We think that this journal has a useful and essential function to perform for the party, but its usefulness will only last so long as members take an interest in it. There are many current topics of discussion within the party, and we feel sure that many members have interesting views that could be expressed in these pages.

If you have got something to say to other members, sit down and write about it, and forward the result of your efforts to this committee at Head Office. If members fail to do this, our journal will not be able to continue.

Editorial Committee.

Since the publication of the documents relating to "W.B. of Upton Park", there has been further discussion within the party, and the E.C. have passed a resolution relating to the matter.

Hackney Branch have issued a circular concerning this resolution and Comrade Lake has also written to the branches. We are reproducing these letters here, together with the replies to correspondence in the 1932 "Socialist Standard" which further define the party's case on the matter.

Editorial Committee.

SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN
Hackney Branch

To: ALL BRANCHES & E.C. MEMBERS

Dear Comrades,

The following statement was adopted by this Branch at its meeting of July 26th, by 11 votes to nil, 13 members being present -

On July 7th the Executive Committee decided by 7 votes to 5 to issue, in reply to a Branch, the following statement of the Party's attitude to reforms:

"That Fulham Branch be informed that the Party is opposed to reformism and does not support reforms of any description. The Party has only one policy - the accomplishment of Socialism. The more persistently and unswervingly this policy is pursued the more reforms will be conceded by the ruling class in order to head off the movement for Socialism. Apart from reforms that are in the direct interest of Capitalism, the ruling class looks at all reforms from that point of view. Thus in general, reforms that are put into effect are aimed at hindering the movement towards Socialism by allaying dangerous discontent, whatever may have been the intentions of those who proposed them. Hence, the Party does not commend reforms or reformers, regardless of the nature of the particular reforms."

The Hackney Branch is deeply concerned by the contents of this statement. We believe that it lays down a crucial departure from the established Party attitude to reforms and that it must be challenged at once.

The Party's view on this question has always been the one summarised briefly as "We are opposed to reformism but not necessarily to reforms." This was laid down in the E.C.'s statement (recently published in full in 'Forum') replying to the dissidents in the "W.B. of Upton Park" controversy in 1910, wherein the E.C. pointed out that legislation can be and is at times beneficial to the working class, and that the Party has a vital interest in legislation which, for example, would safeguard working-class life and limb.

As far as we know, that view has never been disputed since. In September 1932, in a reply to a correspondent in the "Socialist Standard" the reply said -

"The S.P.G.B. does not hold that the measures already taken or to be taken by the capitalists are all of them bound to be useless or harmful to the workers, or to impede progress towards Socialism. Some of the

isting capitalists immediately or in the long run, has not been correspondingly harmful to the workers. The Socialist Party holds that some of the measures brought forward by the capitalists owing to economic developments or owing to conflicts of interest between sections of the capitalists themselves, can be used as weapons in the class struggle. That being the case, a socialist minority in Parliament or on a local council would be required by the socialists who sent them there to criticise from the socialist standpoint all measures brought before them (pointing out their futility in comparison with Socialism and so forth), and to refrain from supporting, bargaining or allying themselves with any party for temporary ends, but at the same time would be required to vote for particular measures where there is a clear gain to the workers and the socialist movement in so doing.

..... The position which the S.P.G.B. has always taken up, and which is outlined above, differs fundamentally from the position of candidates elected on reform programmes by reformist voters. In the case of socialists elected on a socialist programme, the decision lies with socialists, well able to judge the merits from a socialist standpoint. In the case of reformists (the I.L.P. for example) the decision rests with a Party and an electorate which do not know and accept the socialist case, and are incapable of judging from the socialist standpoint."

This statement was approved by the E.C. when, in October 1934 it resolved: - "That Glasgow Branch be informed that, as the article dealing with the question of reforms in the September 1932 'Socialist Standard' lays down the position of the Party on this question, we see no useful purpose to be served in dealing further with this matter."

We have quoted this statement at length because it is the last "Official" statement made by the Party on reforms, and because it contrasts with the statement now made by the present E.C. The resolution passed on July 7th lays down a position wherein the Party rejects all reforms as useless to the working class, and refuses even to envisage the established attitude of judging them on their merits.

We contend that this statement is, therefore, one which has no support from previous Party ruling and practice, and that in making it, the E.C. is laying down new lines of policy: something which the Executive Committee may not do, as was affirmed by a Conference resolution in 1954.

Hackney Branch asks all other Branches to give this matter their serious consideration. The Socialist Party's attitude to reforms has stood for nearly fifty years on the simple proposition that, while our hostility to reformism never varies, we see individual measures in terms of their worth to the working class. The E.C.'s statement has written off this attitude. We want the Executive Committee to be told that it is still the Party's attitude - and that, if there is to be a change of policy in 1959 or any other year, that change is the function of the membership as a whole and not of the E.C.

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THE E.C. REPLY TO FULHAM BRANCH.

The reply to Fulham Branch accepted by the E.C. on July 7th '59, reverses the position held by the Party since the reply to W.B. of Upton Park.

The reason given for our opposition to reforms is:-

"Thus, in general reforms that are put into effect are aimed at hindering the movement towards Socialism by allaying dangerous discontent."

This may be true, but it is not our reason for opposing reforms. To say that some reforms will allay discontent implies that they will be of some benefit to the working class.

improvement in working class conditions because it will make the workers less receptive to our propaganda.

Even if this was correct, its an impossible position for the Party to take up. But I don't agree with the reasoning.

People are prompted to consider the case for Socialism by a variety of factors, and extreme poverty, if at all, plays a very small part.

There are other implications which we could not accept. The successful outcome of a strike would have a similar effect to that of a "beneficial reform" and on this line of reasoning we should welcome the workers defeat in an industrial dispute.

Further, if we oppose reforms because they allay discontent, then we must accept the opposite and welcome measures that lower the standard of living or are of a repressive character, because they would arouse discontent.

The position as I understand it, previous to the reply to Fulham Branch, is, that we are opposed to a reform programme and to all reformist organisations, but not opposed to reforms as such.

This attitude has served the Party well for many years and in my view, is the most satisfactory one for the Party to maintain.

To overthrow this position, the E.C. were out of order. This should only be done by a Conference or by a poll of the Party.

Fraternally,

E. Lake.

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THE SOCIALIST ATTITUDE TO REFORMS.

Two correspondents (A.T. Delman, Los Angeles, and a reader in London, E.C.I.) ask us to explain our attitude and Marx's attitude towards reforms. The two letters and our reply are given below.

Los Angeles, Calif.

Dear Comrades :

The following is Marx's introduction to the French Labour Party Programme of 1880. This appeared in the Proletarian Opposition Bulletin of Chicago, Illinois, Number 3, January, 1932, and is a translation from the "Elementarbucher des Kommunismus" - Wage, Labour and Capital - Berlin, 1930, page 67, and "Marx-Engels Program Critiques" - same series as before, pages 69 and 70. These works are published by the German Communist Party.

Whereas :-

The emancipation of the productive classes is that of all mankind, regardless of differences of sex;

The producers can be free only to the degree in which they control the means of production;

There are only two forms under which they can possess the means of production;

1. The individual form which never existed as a general condition and is being more and more eliminated by the advance of industry;

2. The collective form, whose material and intellectual elements are being perfected by capitalist society's own evolution;

Whereas :-

Collective appropriation can be achieved only through the revolutionary action of the class of producers, or the proletariat organised as a separate political party;

at the disposal of the proletariat, inclusive of the right of universal suffrage, so that the ballot may be changed from the means of deception it has been until now into an instrument of emancipation.

The French socialist workers, proclaiming the aim of regaining all means of production to collective ownership have decided, as a means of organisation and of conflict, to enter the election campaign with the following demands:

(A) POLITICAL DEMANDS.

1. - Abolition of all laws against the press, associations and unions, and particularly of the law against the international association of the workers. Abolition of the work book, this degrading insignia of the working class, as well as the laws which place the worker in relation to the employer and woman in relation to men in a subordinate position.
2. - Elimination of all budget appropriations to the church and return of the property (known as the "dead Hand") to the state of all mobile and immobile property belonging to the religious societies (decree of the Commune of April 2nd, 1871), including all industrial and commercial properties of these societies.
3. - Abolition of the state debt.
4. - Abolition of the standing army and general military conscription.
5. - The Communes shall be granted home rule and their own police.

(B) ECONOMIC DEMANDS.

1. - A weekly day of rest, or a law that will prohibit employers to operate more than six days out of seven. Legal limitation of the daily hours of labour to eight for adults. Abolition of the employment of children under fourteen years of age in private places of employment and a reduction of the hours of labour to six for those between the ages of fourteen to eighteen.
2. - Protection of apprentices in the form of control through the labour unions.
3. - A definite minimum wage which shall be determined annually through a statistical labour commission in accordance with the prices of necessities prevailing in the given communities.
4. - A law which shall prohibit the employers to hire foreign workers at wages lower than those demanded by French workers.
5. - Equal wages for both sexes performing the same work.
6. - Education and vocational training of all children who shall be supported by the community through the state and the commune.
7. - Support of the aged and those unable to work by the community.
8. - Prohibition of all interference by employers in the administration of labour mutual aid banks, insurance, etc., which shall be entrusted to the exclusive directions of the workers.
9. - Responsibility of employers in case of accident through deposit of a bond which the employer has to pay to the labour banks and which shall be adjusted in accordance with the number of workers employed in an enterprise, and to the degree of danger connected with activity in such enterprise.
- 10.- The right of objection by workers to the special labour rules in the various places of work, prohibition of the privilege assumed by employers to penalise their workers in the form of fines or wage reductions (decree of the Commune, April 27th, 1871).
- 11.- Abolition of all contracts in which public property is entrusted to others (such as banks, railroads, mines, etc.) and transfer of all state places of employment to the workers employed therein.
- 12.- Abolition of all indirect taxes and change of direct taxes into a progressive income tax on all incomes over 3,000 francs, prohibition of inheritance in the indirect line, and of all direct inheritances amounting to more than 20,000 francs.

Taken in its broad aspect the revolutionary method as held by the S.P.G.B. is unalterably opposed to reforms or palliatives as confusing and obscuring the class conflict.

The S.P.G.B. maintains that -

1. Reforms deal with effects.
2. Further entrench capitalism.
3. Lead to compromise and bargaining with capitalist parties and candidates.
4. Nothing short of Socialism can cure existing evils.

How does the S.P.G.B. reconcile its revolutionary method to Marx's advocacy of these Political and Economic demands "as a means of organisation and of conflict, to enter the election campaign"?

Yours fraternally,

A. T. DELMAN.

The second letter reads as follows :-

Dear Comrade,

I see in the "Communist Manifesto" that Engels, in his preface, writes :-

As I write these lines, the proletariat of Europe and of America is holding a review of its forces; it is mobilised for the first time as One army, marching forward under One flag, and fighting for One immediate aim :- Eight-hour working day, established by legal enactment (as was demanded by the Geneva Congress of the International Working men's Association, and again by the International Socialist Congress held in Paris in 1889).

("Communist Manifesto," Engels' Preface, written in 1890. E. & C. Paul's translation. Published, Modern Books Ltd., 1929)

The S.P.G.B. is opposed to fighting for reforms on the political field, yet here we see Engel's advocating an "eight-hour day."

Do not the above quotations show that the S.P.G.B. is at variance with Marx & Engels.

Yours, etc.

London, E.C.1.

Reply.

The translation of the programme adopted in 1880 by the French organisation "Le Parti ouvrier" does not fully agree with the original doubtless due to its having been translated first into German and then into English. The original is reproduced on page 261 of Paul Louis' "Histoire du Socialisme en France" (published in 1925 by Marcel Riviere, Paris). While the version quoted by our correspondent is substantially accurate, several phrases are omitted, some words are mistranslated, and in some passages the English wording is not clear. For reasons of space we cannot reproduce the whole programme here, but one or two mistakes are worth correcting.

In the opening sentence the original reads "productive class", not "productive classes", and "differences of sex" should read "differences of sex or race". The original gives a list of kinds of means of production ("land, factories, ships, banks, credit, etc."). The sentence immediately preceding "A. Political Demands" should read "with the following immediate demands", not "with the following demands."

Clause 4 under "Political Demands" should read "general arming of the people," not "general military conscription."

The precise part played by Marx and Engels in drafting it is not clear, although it is evident that they did have a hand in it. Paul Louis, in the work referred to above, says (page 261), "The programme was the result of the collaboration of Guesde and Lafargue with Marx and Engels." In a letter dated 7th May, 1932, Louis writes, "It is impossible

to fix exactly the part that Marx took in drawing up the manifesto of the Parti Ouvrier in 1880. One knows only that he collaborated with Engels, Guesde and Lafargue."

B. G. De Montgomery, in his "British and Continental Labour Policy" (Kegan Paul, London, 1922, page 12) says that Guesde came to London to confer with Marx and Engels. Montgomery says that this programme was "worked out after the so-called Gotha programme, which was adopted in 1875 by the German Social Democracy."

Ryazanov, in his "Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels" (Martin Lawrence, London, 1927), says (p.211) that Marx "was taking an active part in the working out of the programme". Ryazanov also says that this 1880 programme of the French Party served as the pattern for the subsequent programmes of the Russians and the Austrians, and as a pattern for the later German "Erfurt Programme", and that a book in which it was elaborated ("What the Social Democrats Want") exercised a great influence on the Russian Movement.

One thing that has to be remembered is that Marx and Engels were prepared on occasion to compromise in order to secure agreement which they thought would help on the Socialist movement. They accepted statements with which they disagreed in order to secure general agreement on a programme of whose main points they approved. Ryazanov, in his "Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels", tells how this happened in connection with the constitution of the International Working Men's Association (See Chapter VIII). Consequently the knowledge that Marx and Engels were consulted about the programme of the French Party in 1880 does not necessarily mean that they approved of all of it.

Having now cleared the ground we can come to the point which our correspondents raise. They find that the S.P.G.B., which claims to be a Marxist organisation, does not issue a programme of immediate demands and does not fight for reforms on the political field. Yet Marx and Engels associated themselves with programmes of immediate demands.

The first point to notice is that the S.P.G.B. holds precisely the same view as Marx and Engels on the need to abolish Capitalism and establish Socialism. In the preamble to the French Party's programme the statement that the French Socialist workers "have decided as a means of organisation and of struggle to enter the elections with the following immediate demands," is preceded by the declaration that "the object of their efforts" was "the political and economic expropriation of the capitalist class and the restoration of all the means of production to collective ownership" (Louis, page 261). It is important to notice that this attitude is not that of the various reformist parties which wish to retain capitalism while improving it with reforms. These parties are not seeking power to expropriate the capitalist class and institute social ownership of the means of production. They make reforms the object of their activities, while the drafters of the French programme were entering the elections with the programme of immediate demands "as a means of organisation and of struggle."

That was the view in 1880 of those who drafted the programme in question. It is not the view of the S.P.G.B. Experience has taught the lesson that programmes of immediate demands do not serve as a means of organising socialist parties. They serve as a sure means of destroying socialist unity, of thrusting the socialist objective into the background, and of attracting into the organisation non-socialist elements which drag it into the mire of compromise and bargaining with capitalist parties. Every one of the capitalist countries provides its examples of parties whose original socialist aims have been submerged and their organisation disrupted in this way. The French 1880 programme is a case in point. The party which adopted it did not last for a year. Within 12 months one wing, which wanted to work through the existing political groups, broke away and formed the "Alliance Socialiste Republicaine." Another wing, composed of Anarchists, renounced Socialism entirely. The third group, the majority, formed the "Parti Ouvrier Socialiste Revolutionnaire."

And within another year this latter party broke up further into "possiblists" and "impossiblists." (See Bliss, "A Handbook of Socialism," Swan Sonnenschein, 1907, p.76.)

So much for the immediate demands which were intended to be a means of "organisation". Other countries provide similar examples. Reference was made above to Ryazanov's statement about the 1880 French programme having served as a pattern for parties in Germany, Austria and Russia. Where now are these parties which were to fight for Socialism on this programme? With the exception of the Bolshevik wing of the Russian Party, and minorities in the German and Austrian parties, they all of them developed before 1914 into parties of reform and nothing else, parties of political bargaining, parties of war supporters. History has proved the danger of building a party on such a basis.

The S.P.G.B., in declining to put forward a programme of immediate demands, does not take up the untenable position that the position of the workers under Capitalism is such that they could not be worse off if they gave up the struggle to defend their wages and working conditions; nor do we maintain that reforms are valueless. What we do maintain is that reform programmes inevitably attract reformists, and produce reformist organisations incapable of working for Socialism; that only by working directly for Socialism will it be achieved; that parties lacking solid socialist support and depending on reformists cannot achieve Socialism even if they obtain control of the political machinery; that reforms cannot end the subject-position of the working class although they may be of small temporary or sectional benefit; that the small value of the reforms obtainable by reformist political action is in no way commensurate with the years of work and the volume of effort required to achieve them; and that incidentally the capitalists will give concessions more readily in an endeavour to keep the workers away from a growing socialist movement than they will in response to the appeals of bodies based on programmes of reforms.

Does it follow from this that we believe Marx and Engels to have been wrong? The answer is that Marx and Engels, even after discovering the main laws of social development, still had to learn by experience how best to apply their knowledge to the practical tasks of working-class organisation. They never ceased to clarify their views and change them whenever experience showed the need for a change. As Engels states in his 1891 preface to "Wage-Labour and Capital," all of Marx's writings which were published before the first part of his Critique of Political Economy differ from those published afterwards, and "contain expressions and even entire sentences, which from the point of view of his later writing, appear rather ambiguous and even untrue." (See "The Essentials of Marx", published by the Vanguard Press, New York, 1926, p. 71) This was because Marx had studied further and learned more. Among the early ideas which Marx and Engels abandoned in later life was the idea of armed revolt. Experience taught them the futility of "barricades."

We have learned from the endeavours of Marx and Engels, and are only proceeding in accordance with their fundamental ideas when we point out that experience has also shown the danger and uselessness of programmes of immediate demands.

Ed. Comm.

(Socialist Standard, July 1932)

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SOCIALIST ACTION IN PARLIAMENT, ETC.

In the July issue of the Socialist Standard we explained why a Socialist Party must be based on, and must fight elections on, the simple demand for Socialism and not on a programme of reforms or even on the demand for Socialism linked up with a programme of reforms. Several

of Socialists in Parliament or a majority of Socialists on a local council towards measures introduced by capitalist parties. We print below one of these letters :-

Bentley,
Doncaster.

To the Editorial Committee.

For the benefit of a few readers of the "S.S." could you give the Party's position upon a few points that arise from the 6th Clause of the Declaration of Principles.

Seeing that Socialism is the object of the Party, and that the 6th Clause is the method advocated to get power to establish it, what would be the attitude or position of a single candidate or a few S.P.G.B. candidates who were elected by class conscious electors to the House of Commons, towards the problems discussed by capitalist politicians?

What would be the Socialist attitude towards the following measures that were being put on the Statute Book by, say, a Labour Government? :-

An Improved Minimum Wage Bill for all workers,
An improved Compensation Act,
A Shorter Working Day for a section or for all workers,
Abolition of the Means Test.

What would be the attitude of the single socialist or a minority of socialists on the Local Councils towards the problems discussed in Council?

Finally, in the event of a few Constituencies voting a majority of Class Conscious Socialists into power in the local councils, what would be their attitude from the point of view of administration of Council work?

Hoping a reply to the same will fulfil a useful purpose.

Yours,

Edward Littler.

Reply.

The Socialist Party of Great Britain has as its object the establishment of Socialism. It is a revolutionary party based on the class struggle, and not a reform party. Holding that no amelioration of the workers' condition can be obtained under capitalism that would be worth the amount of time and energy spent in working and organising to obtain it, the Socialist Party is opposed to the waste of such time and energy, and to the confusion involved in attempting to improve capitalism by means of reforms, thus obscuring the class struggle. A party claiming to be socialist, but with a list of reforms or "immediate demands", attracts reformers who are not socialists, and has a reformist and not a socialist electorate behind it. Even if such a party obtains political control it is useless for the purpose of furthering Socialism.

While the S.P.G.B. is opposed to a reformist policy the socialist delegate in Parliament or on a local council is not, therefore, bound to vote against every particular measure. The Socialist Party of Great Britain does not hold that the measures already taken or to be taken by the capitalists are all of them bound to be useless or harmful to the workers, or bound to impede progress towards Socialism. Some of the suffrage, factory and trade union legislation in the past, while assisting capitalists immediately or in the long run, has not been correspondingly harmful to the workers. The Socialist Party holds that some of the measures brought forward by the capitalists owing to economic developments or owing to conflicts of interest between sections of the capitalists themselves can be used as weapons in the class struggle by the workers and by the socialist movement. That being the case, a socialist minority in Parliament or on a local council would be required by the socialists who sent them there to criticise from the socialist standpoint all measures brought before them (pointing out their ~~futility~~ in comparison with

or allying themselves with any party for temporary ends, but at the same time would be required to vote for particular measures where there is a clear gain to the workers and the socialist movement in so doing. (The decision would, of course, be in the hands of the Party, and not in the hands of the individual.) It may be added that such measures are more likely to be put forward when Socialism is imminent, and a frightened ruling class is striving to keep back the flood by making concessions.

The position which the S.P.G.B. has always taken up, and which is outlined above, differs fundamentally from the position of candidates elected on reform programmes by reformist voters. In the case of socialists elected on a socialist programme, the decision lies with socialists, well able to judge the merits from a socialist standpoint. In the case of reformists (the I.L.P., for example) the decision rests with a party and an electorate which do not know and accept the socialist case, and are incapable of judging from the socialist standpoint.

With regard to the issues raised by our correspondent, it is of little use to give a yes or no answer, because the effect of particular measures depends on the time and circumstances and the actual clauses of the measures in question. It is not sufficient merely to be told that a bill is described by its supporters as a bill for a minimum wage, or for an improved compensation law, etc. Advocates of a minimum wage have often associated it with the prohibition of strikes, and a Minimum Wage Bill might have tacked on to it a clause penalising strikers. The abolition of the Means Test may look like a clear issue on which a socialist minority would be instructed to vote for abolition, but it must be borne in mind that a proposal for its nominal abolition would probably be linked up with the imposition of some other objectionable procedure.

What is stated above in connection with a minority in Parliament explains also the attitude of a minority on a local council. A socialist minority on the London County Council, for instance, would vote for a proposal to restore the right of selling literature and taking up collections in London parks since the S.P.G.B. are the chief sufferers from the prohibition introduced a few years ago.

Our correspondent's last question refers to a majority on a local council.

By the time a few constituencies had voted a majority of class conscious socialists into control of the local councils the rest of the country would be on the verge of doing the same thing, and on the verge of sending a majority of socialist delegates to Parliament also. If such a hypothetical situation arose the socialist majority would use the limited power, funds and organisation of the municipalities to help with the task of capturing the central seat of power, in every way available.

In conclusion, we must emphasise that the object of the Socialist Party of Great Britain is the establishment of Socialism. This purpose, in an organisation based solely upon the demand for Socialism, and putting forward candidates on that and nothing else, cannot be forgotten or submerged. Our policy, our organisation, and all our activities are governed by that objective. The question of voting for or against, or ignoring measures introduced by non-socialist parties, does not and cannot influence our policy towards the objective.

Ed. Comm.

(Socialist Standard, September 1932)

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The whole idea behind the following suggestions to revise the party rules is to give the membership a greater opportunity to study the implications of the object and principles in relation to the every-day events of the world around them. The general complaint today amongst the members, a complaint which goes far back in the history of the party, is that we have not got the speakers and the writers in sufficient numbers to cope with the demand for our propaganda activities. Because of this the party remains small, is in fact diminishing in numbers, and consequently the growth and development of socialist ideas becomes ever more difficult to accomplish.

The following amendments to rules are therefore suggested together with the reasons which is thought justifies them.

Rule 6. Delete the word "six" in line three and substitute the word "twenty". This is suggested in order that a branch of the party may effectively function (and by function is meant the ability to indulge in activity in the locality, i.e. finances to meet the cost of hall hire, publicity expenses and talented speakers to conduct the propaganda work of the branch, WITHOUT THE ASSISTANCE OF HEAD OFFICE.) To be able to engage in such activity implies a local membership about fifty strong. Such a branch strength would suggest the obvious need for it's own executive committee to control the administration.

To inaugurate a branch with a minimum number of twenty implies that prior to this stage having been reached, the regional group which preceded the formation would have accomplished the task of preparing its members for its ultimate purpose. It would have succeeded in this because of its greater freedom to concentrate on this final objective, freedom to prepare the members through the medium of planned talks and discussions centred round the implications of the object and principles in relation to world events.

Even with twenty members as the minimum number, there has to be faced the fact that these would be unlikely to be so placed as to be able to guarantee regular attendances at branch meetings or to give their time in other directions. Nevertheless with such a number at least it would be possible to find the needed branch officials. Many branches have fallen away in the past, because the new members have lacked an opportunity to become well grounded in their understanding of the party case, and this again has been due to the fact that they have not had the opportunity for engaging in the discussions needed for such a purpose.

To imagine, therefore, that it is futile to defer the inauguration of a branch until there are twenty willing members is to completely overlook the value of the preparatory work which would have been going on prior to this point. It is this very fundamentally basic work which is so vitally important and it is the absence of this work which it is suggested may largely explain the present unsatisfactory state of the party. It may likewise be imagined what has been the situation in the past. Here with six keen members an attempt has been made to undertake a task which experience should tell us has been quite beyond their powers. It implied to start with that these six would be in identically circumstances, so far as time and inclination were concerned; that they would be able to keep their commitments, attend regularly and encourage sympathisers to rally round them. Well, it has not worked out like this, and the net result is that having been deluded by the rule to "have a go", after a lapse of a few weeks, disappointed by the unavoidable absence or the repeated late arrival of one and the other, the whole effort collapses and is eventually looked upon as a hopeless business. In the end we are faced with those forms "F". We should not overlook, therefore, the time factor in building up the party. With twenty, therefore, the prospects are reasonable, because of the basic work previously undertaken.

Rule 13. Delete the words "at least" in lines one and two.

It is questionable whether it is necessary for the E.C. to meet once every week. Those elected to undertake the administrative work of the party, having often to undertake long journeys to Head Office, would probably welcome such a respite. This would give those who were so

disposed more time to consider the work of the party in its broad implications and better qualify them to adjudicate on the essentially important aspects of their administrative tasks.

Rule 14. To be amended to read:

"The Executive Committee shall keep a record of each of its meetings, such records to contain the names of the E.C. members and how they vote on matters of policy and principle. They shall also report to the Delegate Meeting and Annual Conference."

Upon the acceptance of this amendment by the members, hinges the hopes held out in the other amendments.

The present size of the party does not justify the time involved in sending E.C. reports to the branches. But apart from this it has been one of the principal causes of the work in the branches being stultified to such an extent that it has become a ritual. In the first place, little of staggering importance happens week by week in a party of our size. Secondly, in the absence of pro and con discussion associated with the various resolutions cited - and of course this is quite impracticable - the reports are to a large extent pointless. It will be argued that such a procedure advocated here is undemocratic. It may be, but nevertheless for the other reasons given, it is straining the democratic methods to unreasonable and unmanageable limits. Besides, the rules provide six branches with an opportunity to question any matter at any time and of course there are the two occasions during the year, the Delegate Meeting and the Annual Conference, which again offer the member every opportunity of reviewing the work of the E.C. Fear not, therefore, ye democratic demons! Also those members who seldom grace the branch room with their presence might turn up. Remember these E.C. reports are read to the assembled victims, dot comma and dash, and naturally, due to their contents, would hardly excite a great deal of attention, unless one is monk minded. In fact these E.C. reports are equivalent to the Lord's prayer at a P.S.A. Imagine, again, a sympathiser turning up one night to a branch meeting, and instead of being regaled with a brilliant exposition of the case for the abolition of capitalist system, finds himself the victim of this party ritualism. He would look, listen and at the end of five minutes look again - for the door! It is to be emphasized therefore, that the rule, and the fossilized outlook of the membership which permits that rule to remain, governing the number needed to start a branch, has been the means of snuffing the candles of many hundreds who have joined and who have subsequently melted - "like snow upon the desert's dusty face" - away. (May Marx turn in his grave, may the pyramids, even the Himalays collapse before any member dare walk across the rule book and deface it with even the shadow of such diabolical pretentiousness, whisper the Party "right wingers").

What is all this pleading for? just a little fresh air in party procedure; in its approach to the age old problem of getting socialism over to the working class. First let us therefore abolish one of the suffocating obstacles, the democratic mania for recording the yawns, the sighs and the physical and financial necessities of the E.C. as contained in their weekly reportings. They are obstacles, snuffing those desired opportunities for a few to be gathered together in "holy word lock", to discuss and debate the implications of the socialist objective in relation to the every day events going on in the world. If the members crave for these opportunities, we may imagine the state of the sympathiser palpitating to get in on the feast which Socialism offers!! Most of us know that we haven't the necessary membership for what the keener ones aspire to do. It says a lot also for the powers of endurance of those who know this and still have to suffer it.

To conclude, therefore, let us plan at least to give the membership those opportunities to read, think and inwardly digest. This is the burden of my song and if what has been suggested proves helpful to this end, it will be more than enough; So let the Party sing!!

The Socialist Standard.

There isn't much doubt that at least one branch of the S.P.G.B. is split over a problem which is probably as old as the party itself. In the first place I refer to Islington Branch and in the second to the layout, design and presentation of the "Socialist Standard".

As quite a new member of only two years standing, I feel strongly about this, because it is not long since a resolution was passed by the above named branch, (the voting was five for-five against), condemning the photos and present lay-out of the paper.

Members can believe me or not, but quite a bit of time was devoted to the massive problem as to whether we should call the "Standard" the 'Journal' or "the official party organ". How petty can we get? What the hell difference does this make?

And whilst I am asking questions I would be grateful if any of the party eggheads could tell me just WHO we are trying to reach with our propaganda?

Are we going to cater for the masses, which means photos (not necessarily of party members "singing in the rain"), easy to understand articles of the Comrade Coster type, and so create a higher circulation or are we catering for the few learned professor types (who don't need to be informed that Socialism is the only sane system of society) awarding full marks for "Standards" Marx full?

A "Socialist Standard" with a front page with a punch such as the May and June issues has been long overdue. Old party members raise their hands in horror, exclaiming "Where will it all end?" just because the "official organ" is altered to "the Journal".

To see the reactions of some members to the June issue one would have thought Liberace was on the front page of the 'Standard' instead of the comrades in the rain at Hyde Park! How perfectly ridiculous!! The age old theories are trotted out -- "Ah we mustn't have comrade Bloggs's 'physog' on the front page -- he'll be getting too big headed". ---- "There must be no personalities" ---- "If I've been speaking at one of our party meetings I don't want my name mentioned in the Standard".

I think it is time we caught hold of ourselves. Why do some members wear a quite sizeable badge in their lapels? If certain members wish to remain anonymous and aloof why do they use some of the choice invective I've heard at a few meetings?

Can't we face the fact that we have got to move with the times whether we like it or not? We know Marx was right. No doubt quite a few people find Comrade Wilmott's articles on Marx stimulating, cleverly written and instructive. I repeat "quite a few", but I would suggest that the majority of the working class would read E.W.'s reply to Galbraith's essay on Historical Materialism and half way through would utter one word - "phooey".

There is not the shadow of a doubt that people like E.W. are able to absorb a vast amount of dry as dust facts on the subject of economics, but this does not mean that they are capable of propagating the case for Socialism.

We are bombarded with the facts that the idea of a Socialist society is a simple one - "from each according to his ability to each according to his need" - "production for use instead of production for profit". Why on earth do we have to go into "high-faluting" terms to explain ourselves?

Speaking from our platforms we do not, as a rule, use complicated phrases to our audiences -- why should our writers? We must face the fact that the public are submerged in a sea of 'Daily Mirror' etc., and if we think that they are going to clutch hold of the old type 'Standard' for a straw, then I suggest we are gravely mistaken. They like their dailies! Only a fool would deny it. They lap them up! It is not our job to drag

ourselves down to the same level as these papers. But it is important to the party that we should endeavour to compete with them.

In conclusion I would like to emphasize my point concerning the propagation of the Socialist case. We are not trying to make "thinkers" think. The professors, the learned ones, the egg heads will find it all out for themselves. In any case if we must have long winded Marxist arguments, what is the "Forum" for?

We must aim at the working class, and just as you begin teaching a child with Hans Anderson's 'Fairy Tales' leading up to Shakespeare - so it is with Socialism.

If we return to the old 'Standard' I see no reason why we should criticise the Labour Party, saying "Look at them over 50 years of reforms and we are no nearer Socialism", because the very same could be said of our dull as ditch-water method of presenting the case for Socialism.

Yours fraternally,

----- R.J. Otter.

THE PARTY AND PROSPERITY

In the S.S. in recent years, there has been a marked reluctance on the part of most contributors to admit that the working class in Britain today is considerably better off than it was, say 50 years ago. Some writers have even sought to show that present-day prosperity is non-existent, and that no appreciable improvement in conditions has taken place since pre-war days.

I think that distortions of this kind can only make the Party look old-hat and rather ridiculous. There is plenty of evidence to show that the real income of the average working-class family is far more than before the war, and far, far, greater than when the Party was founded. One would have thought that this was apparent to anyone, even without the statistics and social surveys.

If in fact the Party in 1904 denied that capitalism could do anything to satisfy the material poverty of the time, then we should not be restricted by this view, but should be prepared to admit that we were wrong. The founder members of the Party could hardly be expected to foresee the developments within capitalism since that time, and an admission of error would certainly be no criticism of them. After all, Marx himself was wrong in many of his predictions of the future development of capitalism, but this hardly detracts from his examination of the system.

I feel that the party should now really examine the new problems that modern capitalism has produced. This means removing the emphasis that we place on general working class poverty. I know that sections of the working class (and particularly old-age pensioners) are still poor, but nevertheless, the working class of today does not, and will not, accept that they live in a condition of poverty.

I believe that capitalism has produced many new problems, which are inextricably bound up with prosperity, and that in many ways, capitalism today does even less to satisfy the needs (and not just material needs) of mankind than it did in 1904. On this the Party could say something really useful, but not while we are still cluttered up with ideas that are no longer generally applicable.

This is only a brief outline of my views on this topic, but I would welcome the opportunity of discussing this at greater length in these columns.

Yours fraternally,

A.W. Ivimey.

For some time past Fulham and Chelsea Branch have been in disagreement with the E.C. on the matter of Reforms. We claim that a majority of members of the E.C. are attempting to change the Party's policy traditional viewpoints. If we are wrong then the membership must tell us so; if the E.C. is wrong then the members must tell them - in no uncertain manner!

Arising from statements on Rent Control made by Comrade Mayes (formerly of S.W. London branch, but now a member of Fulham and Chelsea branch) the following comment was made in a resolution to the E.C. dated 24th November, 1958, by our Branch: "We are of the opinion that the S.P.G.B. never opposed reforms as such, only the proposition that they lead to Socialism." We held the view, and still do, that the objective of a Socialist Party is the establishment of Socialism; that reforms do not lead to Socialism; that reforms still leave the workers a subject, Wage-earning class; that many reforms passed by Parliament are not of benefit to the workingclass; but, at the same time, we hold that some reforms may be of some benefit to workers, and that the Socialist Party is not opposed to reforms as such. They must be judged on their merits - or, in most cases, their demerits. We have always held the view, put forward in an amendment to the second draft reply to Fulham Branch by the Editorial Committee (27th meeting of the 56th E.C.), by Coster and Ivimey (which was lost 5 - 9), in which they say:-

"..... any measure should be considered solely from the point of view of its furtherance of Working-class interests. The Party would, therefore, be prepared to acknowledge a reforms usefulness to the workingclass, or to condemn it as detrimental. Such statements, however, could not involve any identification with the sponsors of such measures or their opponents, but would be made from our unique Socialist point of view."

And, in a recent circular to members, Comrade Lake writes :-

"The position as I understand it, previous to the reply to Fulham Branch, is that we are opposed to a reform programme and to all reformist organisations, but not to reforms as such."

This was made in a reply to the E.C. resolution of July 7th, wherein they say :-

"the Party is opposed to reformism and does not support reforms of any description. The Party has only one policy - the accomplishment of Socialism. The more persistently and unswervingly this policy is pursued the more reforms will be conceded by the ruling class in order to head off the movement for Socialism. Apart from reforms that are in the direct interest of Capitalism, the ruling class looks at all reforms from that point of view. Thus, in general, reforms that are put into effect are aimed at hindering the movement towards Socialism by allaying dangerous discontent. Whatever may have been the intentions of those who proposed them. Hence, the Party does not commend reformers or reforms, regardless of the nature of the particular reforms."

The above E.C. resolution is added to the previous resolution to Fulham Branch, which says: ".... the Party has been completely opposed to the declaration of adding to propaganda for Socialism a declaration of support for any reform." (30.12.58).

In view of the recent statements and resolutions issued by a majority of the S.C. we can only quote Party literature and the reply to W.B. of Upton Park (1910) in order to remind members of the Party's true position on reforms, the possible attitude of Socialists on local councils or in Parliament, and on reformism in general. These statements condemn the present S.C. as a Harry Martin clique; not as representatives of the S.P.G.S.!

In "Family Allowances: A Socialist analysis" the paper prints out (p.8.) that we do not "ask for the support of the workers on a programme of reform measures", and continues:

"It does not necessarily follow that reforms can never be of any benefit to the workers, although it is true that reforms cannot abolish the major evils of capitalism, nor will they generally be introduced to deal with some of the worst evils except when their introduction is necessary to ensure the smooth running of the capitalist system."

Under the title "Political Reforms", "Socialism of Today" states that :-

"It is not the business of a Socialist Party to reform capitalism or to help it to "solve" insoluble problems. Our job is to make enough Socialists that they can abolish it. We do not maintain that no reform can be of benefit to the working class. Hence we are not opposed to reforms as such. Nevertheless, quite a few of the political reforms which seem to be of working-class benefit, turn out to be not so, when examined closely." (p.29. emphasis theirs)

The first official statement of the Party on reforms was an editorial ("The Futility of Reform") in the second "Socialist Standard" (October 1st, 1904). This article clearly puts our case against having "a programme of measures for the partial redress of those evils, which most immediately affect the position of the working class". It also points out the necessity of a Socialist Party having a "clearly defined class war basis"; and not having alliances with parties which do not recognise the class struggle. The article then goes on to point out that measures introduced (which might benefit the working class) are "watered down" by "a representation of the capitalist class. Summing up, the "S.C. editorial says:-

"When a strong Socialist Party, fighting directly for the establishment of a Socialist regime, and prepared to fair progress to secure any advantages which will act as a new vantage ground in their further fight, is organised, then the capitalists will be only too ready to offer and to give each and all of those palliatives as a sop to the growing Socialist forces in the country.

We have, therefore, to recognise all the time that it is only possible to secure any real benefit for the people when the people themselves become class conscious, when behind the Socialists in Parliament and on other bodies there stands a solid phalanx of men clear in their knowledge that the only way to secure the Socialist Commonwealth of the future is to depend only upon the efforts of themselves and those who have the same class conscious aims. Therefore we have no palliative programme. The only palliative we shall ever secure is the Socialist Society of the future gained by fighting uncompromisingly at all times and in every season."

In reply to "W.B." of Upton Park in 1910 the Executive Committee was not so dogmatic about whether Socialists should, at some future date, condemn or give critical support to a reform

be some "measures that may conceivably contain some small advantage for the working-class", the Editorial Committee continues:-

"The S.P.C.B. is always ready to consider new facts and phases when these present themselves, and therefore the question of whether Socialist representatives should support any such measures in Parliament, is one that we do not, in January 1910, pretend to answer."

"Each new situation, will have to be faced and socialist action be decided upon the merits of the case."

Which is something that a majority of the present A.S. is not prepared to do.

In the September 1932 "S.S." the Editorial Committee writes:-

"While the S.P.C.B. is opposed to a reformist policy the socialist delegate in Parliament or on a local council is not, therefore, bound to vote against every particular measure. The Socialist Party of Great Britain does not hold that the measures already taken or to be taken by the capitalists are all of them bound to be useless or harmful to the workers, or bound to impede progress towards Socialism. Some of the suffrage, factory and trade union legislation in the past, while assisting capitalists immediately or in the long run, has not been correspondingly harmful to the workers. The Socialist Party holds that some of the measures brought forward by the capitalists owing to economic developments or owing to conflicts of interest between sections of the capitalists themselves can be used as weapons in the class struggle by the workers and by the socialist movement, that being the case, a socialist minority in Parliament or on a local council would be required by the Socialists who sent them there to criticise from the socialist standpoint all measures brought before them (pointing out their futility in comparison with Socialism and so forth), and to refrain from supporting, bargaining or allying themselves with any party for temporary ends, but at the same time would be required to vote for particular measures where there is a clear gain to the workers and the socialist movement in so doing. (The decision would, of course, be in the hands of the Party, and not in the hands of the individual.) It may be added that such measures are more likely to be put forward when Socialism is imminent, and a frightened ruling class is striving to keep back the flood by making concessions."

One last word: it has been stated that the Socialist Party has never advocated, or suggested that workers' representatives should advocate reform measures. But is not the advocacy of universal suffrage a reform? If so, why do we find the Party suggesting that if the old German Social Democratic Party had "..... concentrated single-mindedly upon the achievement of Socialism, with perhaps the demand for the suffrage, instead of wasting most of its energies upon the fight for reforms - which increased in number as time passed - how different might have been the shape of things in Germany today, as well as in the rest of the world!"

("The Communist Manifesto - and the Next Hundred Years", p.27 emphasis ours).

fiat justitia, ruat caelum!

Yours for Socialism,

Fulham and Chelsea Branch

AND RENT CONTROL By H.M.M.
- The hullabaloo which was raised in the press when the last rent Control Act came into force died down a long time ago, but in the "Forum" it still goes on. Presumably the tenants affected either made fresh terms with their landlords, or bought their houses, or found other accommodation.

I get the impression somehow that Comrade Trotman is living in the past, when whole streets were owned by 'rapacious' landlords. If he took a walk into outer suburbia he will find whole areas where workers are buying their own houses. Many of them have completed their repayments. The two points he appears mainly concerned with are (a) the actual rent, and (b) security of tenure.

It was of course the official Rent Control Act which caused the spate of building houses only for sale in outer suburban areas. Control of prices, as during the last war, causes articles to disappear or go onto the black market. The government then had not learned from rent control that this was the effect of endeavouring to control prices. After the 1914-18 war the capitalists who thought building houses to let was a safe investment re channelled their funds. Some of the less adventurous no doubt invested their money in building societies!

In answer to my query as to how the numerous problems of rent control could be cleared up, Comrade Trotman says that this requires more knowledge, more original thought, and constructive discussion. One could say that this was beating about the bush. In practise a parliamentary Bill rarely makes a straight cut at any issue. It has numerous clauses. Supposing one clause said that security of tenure, as from 1960 would no longer apply to houses bought before 1958. This would affect (a) the worker-owner who wanted to sell his house, (b) the worker who wanted to remain as tenant. Whether Comrade Trotman voted for or against this clause he would categorize one section of the workers or the other.

There is no doubt that the present housing position is a complete muddle. You get people who are paying rents below the economic level, people who are paying through the nose for a couple of furnished rooms, and people who are cannot move to a better job because of the housing difficulty. Even domestic differences arise because families are stuck and cannot move to another town. These anomalies have arisen through government interference in the shape of rent control, subsidies, and the law about tenure security. Everybody is frustrated. One result is that you get the ludicrous position where in cases of families on public assistance living in subsidised houses on a differential rent scheme. The P.A.C. man calls to see how much rent you are paying, and then the Council man calls round to see how much public assistance you are receiving! How on earth a socialist can make constructive prophesies proposals to deal with a situation like this I fail to see.

The present position divides workers into two camps. There are those who would welcome complete decontrol because they see that at least it would make up accommodation available even at an enhanced price. On the other side are those who want rent control to remain because it gives them comparatively cheap accommodation. Can we place ourselves in either camp?

So far as many landlords rent controlled houses are concerned, the profit, if any, is so small that they only hold on to them in the hope that the tenants will die off so that they can sell and get rid of the bloody things. All these problems arise out of the monetary capitalist system in which we live. To try to deal with these problems piecemeal is to put ourselves in the ranks of the reformers. I doubt even the validity of that hoary old argument that socialists could vote against a war. In practise a democratic cabinet declares war and then comes to Parliament afterwards to sanction it. A vote under such circumstances could only be a gesture.

If socialists are going to enter into the ranks of the reformers one of the most crying needs is that more public lavatories are erected. The situation was satisfactory until the brewers started shutting them down and putting them inside. Now you have to walk miles before you can find a place.